United Nations

Daily Highlights

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MONDAY HIGHLIGHTS

+ UNOSOM II carries out air and ground actions in Mogadishu in ongoing disarmament of Somali factions; Secretary-General, in interim report to Security Council, says investigation of 5 June incident points to "conspiracy" by elements of United Somali Congress/Somali National Alliance to commit violence.

+ World Conference on Human Rights must show that "democracy is linked with human rights", Secretary-General tells press conference as Conference begins in Vienna.

+ Sustainable development is economic progress without environmental destruction, Vice-President of United States tells Commission at opening of its first session.

+ In Cambodia, Constituent Assembly is sworn in two weeks after United Nations-supervised elections; Secretary-General's Special Representative appeals to all "to bury the hatchet of yesterday, cease mutual recriminations and concentrate from now on upon the future".

+ Secretary-General regrets decision by Turkish-Cypriot leader to delay his arrival in New York for talks beginning on 14 June; joint meetings will not resume at Headquarters as planned.

+ UNEP hosts meeting to examine link between health problems and environmental conditions in Africa.

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The United Nations Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM II) today conducted a third engagement to neutralise hostile facilities in Mogadishu, after the discovery of more secret weapons storage areas, according to a United Nations spokesman. The air and ground actions were part of an ongoing programme of disarmament which UNOSOM II had been mandated to carry out and which had been agreed to by all Somali factions, he said.

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The actions followed unprovoked attacks on UNOSOM II by Somali gunmen on 5 June, which resulted in the deaths of 23 Pakistani peace-keepers. The Security Council reacted by unanimously adopting resolution 837 (1993), which reaffirmed the Secretary-General's authority to take all necessary measures against those responsible, including their arrest and detention for trial and punishment.

UNOSOM II soldiers had acted in a restrained manner despite extreme provocation, and civilian casualties had been kept to a minimum, the spokesman said. Once the situation had been brought under control, UNOSOM II would continue to ensure that humanitarian work was not hindered.

In an interim report to the Security Council today, the Secretary-General said preliminary reports indicated that civilian crowds, including women and children, had been used by General Aidid and his supporters as "human shields" to screen attacks on fixed guard posts or strong points. Recommending that the Council condemn and take action against those responsible, the Secretary-General said it was apparent that there was a conspiracy to commit premeditated violence and that agitation was used in an attempt to stir public anger. Those responsible had not yet been identified but it was apparent that elements of the United Somali Congress/Somali National Alliance (USC/SNA) conducted the attacks, the report said.

Meanwhile, the spokesman gave details regarding an incident in Mogadishu yesterday in which some civilians had been killed. According to initial reports, the incident had occurred after an organized crowd -- with women and children in front and agitators behind -- had moved towards and threatened a Pakistani strongpoint. While the demonstrators were throwing stones and pulling down a fence in front of the strongpoint, shots were fired at the United Nations soldiers from near or within the crowd, and automatic fire was received from an adjacent building. United Nations soldiers on a rooftop covering the threatened position returned fire, defending their fellow soldiers on the ground. Witnesses had reported that other Somalis accross the street had fired on the crowd, suggesting that the incident had been staged, the spokesman went on to say.

On Saturday, Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali said the measures taken by UNOSOM II should be seen in the context of the international community's commitment to the national disarmament programme endorsed by all Somali parties. The United Nations would continue working with responsible Somali leaders and factions to eliminate the heavy weapons which had been used to terrorize the Somali people for so long.

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The World Conference on Human Rights, which began in Vienna today, was important to show that the United Nations dealt not only with peace-keeping, but with a variety of activities such as economic development, democratization, social problems and human rights, Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali told a press conference in Vienna over the weekend. It was important to show that democracy was "linked with human rights" and that

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democratic institutions protected human rights in different countries all over the world, he said.

The United Nations had received more than 30 demands for assistance from Member States to participate in monitoring elections, he pointed out. Peace-keeping was no more limited to interposing between two conflicting parties but dealt with reconstruction, return of refugees and democratization of the countries.

In reply to a question whether specific cases would be brought up at the Conference, Mr. Boutros-Ghali said such discussions must be avoided because that would transform the Conference into a political debate. He hoped it would be a "technical conference" with emphasis on the search for a "common denominator among different positions" in order to reinforce the connection between human rights, freedoms, basic freedoms and democracy.

The two-week Conference in Vienna, which will bring together high-level representatives from 183 countries, is expected to adopt an agenda for action which could dramatically increase the effectiveness of human rights work in the coming years and into the next century. The Conference follows three days of informal consultations at which senior government officials have attempted to iron out disagreements remaining from the final preparatory meeting in Geneva.

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Economic development is no excuse for environmental vandalism, and economic progress without environmental destruction is what sustainable development is all about, Al Gore, Vice-President of the United States, told the Commission on Sustainable Development this morning, as it opened its first substantive session.

The Clinton Administration not only supported the commitment to change made at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), but was determined to demonstrate real leadership. To that end, President Bill Clinton would today formally establish a 25-member Council on Sustainable Development, he said.

One of the major problems facing the world was population growth, the Vice-President went on to say. Slowing population growth was in the deepest interest of all governments, and was the responsibility of rich and poor countries alike. He noted that technological development increased the impact each person had on the environment.

Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, in a message to the opening meeting, said the challenges facing the Commission on Sustainable Development was to give practical expression to the pledges made at the Rio Summit.

The work of the Commission that began in Rio with agreements reached in Agenda 21, the Rio Declaration, the Forest Principles and the Conventions that were open for signature -- on Climate Change and Biodiversity -- must now be

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marked by performance, he said. The Secretary-General's message was read out by Nitin Desai, Under-Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development.

Razali Ismail (Malaysia), Chairman of the Commission, said progress by the Commission could make real the understanding that environment and development were interrelated and mutually reinforcing. Past global enterprises had generally "run out of steam", he said, but given the current realization that the planet was seriously in danger, it was now possible to do better and live up to commitments.

During its two-week session, the Commission will consider how the international community can implement "Agenda 21", the programme of action adopted by UNCED. It will also review a draft multi-year programme of work addressing the issues of technology transfers, human settlements and health, desertification, forests and biodiversity, and toxic chemicals and hazardous wastes. All those issues will have been considered by 1997, when the General Assembly has called for a major review of Agenda 21.

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In Cambodia, the 120-member Constituent Assembly was sworn in this morning, two weeks after the United Nations-supervised elections ended on 28 May. The mandate of the Assembly is to create and adopt a Constitution based on democratic principles clearly laid out in the 1991 Paris Agreements. The elected officials have three months to carry out this task.

At this morning's inaugural session, the President of the Supreme National Council, Prince Norodom Sihanouk expressed the hope that the Constituent Assembly would inaugurate a new era in Cambodia of liberal democracy, political pluralism, a market economy, and respect for all human rights guaranteed by the Charter of the United Nations.

The Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Yasushi Akashi, appealed to all to "bury the hatchet of yesterday, to cease mutual recriminations and to concentrate from now on upon the future". The willingness of governments and private investors to commit funds to Cambodia would largely depend on the degree of political stability in the country, Mr. Akashi cautioned.

In a related development, Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali has declared the recent elections in Cambodia free and fair and has urged all parties to respect the results.

In his report to the Security Council on the elections, he said the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) would fully support the Constituent Assembly in drawing up a constitution and establishing a new Government. He expressed confidence that the international community would continue to support national reconciliation and peace-building in the country.

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The Leader of the Turkish Cypriot community in Cyprus, Rauf Denktash, has informed Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali that he will not be able to attend the joint meeting with the Greek Cypriots which was scheduled for today, 14 June, a United Nations spokesman said today.

An envoy of Mr. Denktash would be at United Nations today to explain that he had been delayed. As a consequence the joint meetings would not resume at Headquarters as planned, the statement said.

On 1 June, the leaders of the two communities in Cyprus, in the presence of the President of the Security Council and of the representatives of the permanent members of the Security Council, agreed that the joint meetings which had convened at United Nations Headquarters on 24 May would resume no later than 14 June, in order to reach a rapid and clear decision on Varosha and Nicosia International Airport. The resumption was agreed on the basis of an explicit undertaking by Rauf Denktash that the purpose of his consultations in Nicosia and Ankara would be to promote acceptance of these two confidence-building proposals.

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The link between health problems and environmental conditions in Africa will be examined at the Intercountry Meeting on Supportive Environments for Health, begining today at the headquarters of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in Nairobi. The five-day meeting is being jointly organized by UNEP and the World Health Organization (WHO).

Some forty participants from English-speaking African countries will discuss issues of water and sanitation, health hazards from pollution, conservation, capacity-building, education, social support and advocacy. A collection of case studies on health and the environment and a plan for follow-up activities are expected to be drawn up.

The meeting is a continuation of an international process linking the issues of environment and health. The WHO, through its Commission on Health and Environment, and three world conferences on health promotion have focused on the prevention of environmental degradation and the promotion of health.

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